

theme / THE ROAD AHEAD

PROFESSIONAL development as a term and as a strategy has run its course. The future of improvement, indeed of the profession itself, depends on a radical shift in how we conceive learning and the conditions under which teachers and students work. Five key ideas together foreshadow my argument and represent a clarion call to radically change our concept of what teacher learning should entail. These ideas are:

- Professional development as a term is a major obstacle to progress in teacher learning;
- We need to deeply appreciate the meaning of noted educator Richard Elmore's observation (2004) that improvement above all entails "learning to do the right things in the setting where you work" (p. 73);
- Student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time;
- The first three components depend on deprivatizing teaching as teachers work together to continuously improve instruction; and
- Teachers' working conditions are inimical to the four previous points.

Understand these five ideas and their interrelationships and you will understand the future of teacher learning over the next decade.

Professional development involves workshops, courses, programs, and related activities that are designed pre-

sumably to provide teachers with new ideas, skills, and competencies necessary for improvement in the classroom. The notion that external ideas alone will result in changes in the classroom and school is deeply flawed as a theory of action. I am not only referring to irrelevant or poorly conducted professional development, but also to sessions that meet the highest standard of adult learning. These activities are not useless, but they can never be powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough to alter the culture of the classroom and school. One author went so far as to title his article, "Professional development: A great way to avoid change" (Cole, 2004). And professional development is a great way to avoid change — because it lessens the pressure for change, diverts people's energy into thinking they are doing something valuable, and drains energy that should be directed at the hard work of

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THOUGHT LEADER

Michael Fullan



Change the terms for teacher learning

changing school cultures that are deeply rooted in the past.

Second, and more to the point, we have failed to appreciate the profound meaning and implications of Elmore's (2004, p. 73, author's italics) plaintive refrain that we have it all wrong:

"What is missing ... is any recognition that improvement is more a function of *learning to do the right things* in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work" — (and, I would add, than it is of what you know when you come from the latest workshop).

And:

"The problem (is that) there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they actually work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems" (p. 127).

In other words — my third point

— every teacher has to learn virtually every day. Peter Hill, Carmel Crévola, and I have made just such a case in our recent publication, *Breakthrough* (Corwin, 2006). *Breakthrough* sets the high standard of what it would take to get full success (say 95% or more of students learning to be proficient in literacy and mathematics). We conclude that this high level of success is a mission driven at its core by moral purpose, but that the means of getting there require personalization, precision, and professional learning by teachers. Personalization involves understanding and addressing the individual needs of each student as these appear day-by-day, week-by-week. Precision consists of meeting these learning needs in a focused, effective way, again as the needs occur and evolve — timely, on-the-spot precision, not packaged prescription. We then conclude that personalization and precision as just defined cannot possibly occur unless every teacher is deeply immersed daily in learning how to do this, all the while adapting to the dynamic learning needs of students, all the while getting better at meeting those needs. Obviously schools are not set up for personalization, precision, and professional learning. Such work is demanding, and is not professional development but ongoing learning.

My fourth claim is that deprivatizing teaching will be much harder than anyone thought. Deprivatizing teaching changes culture and practice so that teachers observe other teachers, are observed by others, and participate in informed and telling debate on the quality and effectiveness of their instruction. I am not naive here. I realize that in punitive and otherwise misguided accountability regimes, teachers are ill-advised to open their classroom doors. But the research also reveals that even when conditions are more favorable, when implementation strategies are highly

supportive, that many teachers subtly or in other ways play the privatization card (Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006, pp. 2-8). Changing this deeply rooted norm of privacy is tough because such a change requires tremendous sophistication as well as some risk taking by teachers and other leaders. But the future of professional learning requires that we bite the bullet on this one. We are not talking here about just individual cases of teachers opening their doors, but rather all teachers, the professional learning community if you like, embracing this demanding standard.

Fifth, all of these ideas come to a head in the concept of teachers' and principals' working conditions. Working conditions include the structures, norms, and physical and other resource factors that characterize teachers' and principals' daily work. No other profession experiences the dismal, limiting conditions educators face. In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported a crisis of recruitment in the profession. Among other matters, the report recommended that focus should be placed on "creating schools that are organized for student and teacher success" (p. 2), or what I would call improving working conditions at the school level. No one paid much attention to this aspect of the report, and by the time the commission issued its second report in 2003, it had concluded that recruitment is less the problem than retention. Retention problems have much to do with poor working conditions.

Addressing working conditions is critical to improving the capacity of the profession and is an enormously thorny problem. Focusing solutions only on structural matters (e.g. more time for teachers to work together) is a waste of resources. A whole set of issues must be addressed simultaneously: structure, norms, deprivatiza-

tion, focus on results, improved instruction through continuous development, and the like. This revolution implicates governments, unions, school districts, schools, teachers and principals, students and parents, and community alike. Creating change will have to proceed with joint effort and on a pilot, evolutionary basis. Changes in working conditions should be guided by the four components described above.

Nothing could be more important to the future of public education than tackling the fundamental agenda laid out here. I am reminded of Matthew E. May's (2007) account of the principles underlying Toyota's continuing and growing success over the course of a century. May boils it down to three basic principles: ingenuity of craft, pursuit of perfection, and fit with society (p. 3). None of these principles characterize the teaching profession, and that is why we must abandon professional development and make professional learning an everyday experience for all educators.

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Become more sophisticated about diversity.

Children from every background have vast potential. The challenge for coming decades is to equip teachers with skills and tools for differentiating instruction in ways that enable and inspire children from all backgrounds to become excellent students, skilled parents, productive workers, and, ultimately, fulfilled human beings.

By Ronald F. Ferguson

Change the terms for teacher learning.

Improving professional learning involves doing the right things in one's work, understanding that student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time, deprivatizing teaching, and adjusting teachers' working conditions to allow for a different style of learning. These ideas and their interrelationships are the future of teacher learning.

By Michael Fullan

Five flaws of staff development and the future beyond.

Presentism, authoritarianism, commercialism, evangelism, and narcissism are five flaws of current staff development. To improve the field, educators must avoid falling afoul of these flaws by learning from each other, creating their own learning, and driving the improvement.

By Andy Hargreaves

Learn in community with others.

Collective learning will be the hallmark of the school staff in the future, but providing the structures and schedules for school-based educators to come together to learn in community will be a challenge. Schools will need to adjust both structural or physical and human or relational conditions to achieve the goal.

By Shirley M. Hord

Move staff development into the digital world.

Staff developers will need to help teachers learn how to help students learn in the context of a different world — a world in which nearly everyone can be an instructor and in which most instruction will be delivered electronically and will be processed through disciplined dialogue in small groups and seminars.

By Phillip C. Schlechty

NSDC'S CONTRIBUTION

Second to none: A tireless devotion to education leads Stephanie Hirsh to NSDC's top spot.

Stephanie Hirsh's interest in education began in childhood and grew into a passion that has led her from teaching to her new position as executive director of NSDC. She has already contributed significantly to the field of professional learning and distinguished herself as a professional skilled at building personal relationships and developing influential partnerships.

By Joan Richardson

NSDC stands at the vanguard.

Leading educators across the country say NSDC has created a focus on adult learning, opening a dialogue about professional development and raising the profile of the field, connecting practitioners, and helping define what high-quality professional development looks like. In the words of one, it has legitimized adult learning.

By Valerie von Frank

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